

## Interview with Charles Thomas Vetter Jr.

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DR. CHARLES THOMAS VETTER, JR.

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*Q: You can lead off with a thumbnail sketch of your career, and then we'll go into the substance, and anything else you're interested in thereafter.*

VETTER: Well, it began in Columbus, Ohio, with a Kentucky mother and a Michigan father. You might say that began the theme of my life: cross-cultural communications. Of course, here you had the North and the South communicating and arguing with great eloquence. When I was about 1, we moved to Detroit, and from Detroit, when I was about 14, we moved to New York City, where I went to the High School of "Commoice" which was quite different from the public schools in Michigan. My parents did not realize that this was — I hesitate to call it a slum high school — but it was a rough place to be. All boys. And then, because we had no family and we were living — three large people — in a one-bedroom apartment, and no friends — I had graduated pretty high in a class of about 400 students and got into CCNY (College of the City of New York). You had to have an 85 average to get into this free institution.

*Q: I thought they took any high school graduate.*

VETTER: No, that was after the changes that took place in the 1960s and 70's when they changed to "open admissions" and ceased to be the academically elite institution with a

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very high enrollment of Jewish students who were frequently brilliant, but couldn't afford to go to NYU or Columbia. After a year at CCNY, I inherited enough money to go to upstate New York to Hamilton College. I did not finish Hamilton before the War. In 1944, I went into the Navy, into a very long, protracted naval aviation-cadet program that took me to Colgate, Cornell, North Carolina, Glenview, IL, and finally Pensacola. While I was a cadet at Pensacola, I came into contact with many of the Free French that had been sent there to train. I had had about six years of French, but before the War, as you remember, they taught languages to enrich your culture, not to learn how to speak. So it took many, many beers and bottles of wine to develop what became a rather competent fluency. Not in terms of grammar ...

*Q: ...aviation matters...*

VETTER: ...aviation matters, precisely. So when I got my wings, the French Navy found out about the fact, because I had been helping the French translate their exams. Thank God, because they were often experienced pilots, they knew the answers and I got them before I took my exams. So I think, maybe, the fact that I got my commission and wings was thanks to those French I helped. They asked for my body. I went to Instructor's School, and ended the War with the Mission Aeronavale de la Marine Francaise # Memphis, Tennessee [dit avec un accent fran#ais]. I spent the rest of the war with the French in Memphis where there were very few aircraft carriers on the Mississippi.

One of the amusing things there: while instructing, 3 times I came in in one of those Stearman Trainer — we're talking about those Snoopy airplanes, biplanes, open cockpit — with the tops of trees in my landing gear. It was at that juncture that I decided that I had better start instructing in French. Because by the time they went from English to French to action, it produced treetops in the landing gear. But this was really my entre into international affairs in a very profound way.

*Q: Were you already thinking of going into foreign service?*

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VETTER: No. Because of that long childhood with a traveling salesman father and a neurotic Southern mother, I said, if I ever get out of this, I'm going to see as much of the world as I can — it was such a restrictive thing — we had no neighborhood, no friends in New York City — right on 57th street. So that was an impetus to see as much of the world as possible, but I hadn't thought about the Foreign Service seriously until this experience with the French. I came back, and as you did, finished my education — at Hamilton, and then went to the School of Advanced International Studies where I had been admitted for the fall semester, but I went to the summer school. I flew airplanes around the mountains, I went to every dance, I went to every lecture, and I didn't do too much on the courses which were offered, which were Russian Language, Russian Affairs and Groves Haines' European history class. So they said to me, You're admitted, all right, but we strongly suggest that you stay out a year and mature. There I was, like a nun out of a nunnery — living life — this was 1946 — and I was scheduled to be in the class of 1947 at SAIS, which was the second class. So I didn't go back.

I came to Washington in '46, I ended up living in a CIA commune, a co-ed rooming house on Wyoming Avenue north of Dupont Circle, working at Garfinckel's — Lewis & Thomas Saltz, teaching school, and finally I began to get very active in the Republican party. My roommate was a Democrat, but he was going to Young Republican meetings for social reasons. But I began to go for ideological reasons, because as a high school teacher, I found none of the students wanted to do any work — many of them were veterans, older than I was, and I was getting more and more teed off. Particularly as they had automobiles, sometimes convertibles, and I was using the streetcar.

Be that motivation as it was, I got very active in Young Republicans, came to the attention of the National Chairman, ended up as Assistant to the Chairman of the Young Republican National Federation in the pre-convention, convention, campaign, and grand and glorious defeat of Thomas E. Dewey. Of course, I was working for Thomas E. Dewey. In the meantime, I had also started Law School. After Dewey's departure I gave a speech, which

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was considered a New Deal speech, at the Republican National Committee as a young veteran, and that cut me out of my prospective job at the National Committee. So that summer I went to the Academy of International Law at The Hague, 150 students from all over the world for that six-week summer session.

*Q: Who financed that trip for you?*

VETTER: It wasn't financed. I put on my Navy uniform and hitchhiked over — it was during the Berlin Airlift, so it was pretty easy going over.

*Q: You were probably still in the Inactive Reserves.*

VETTER: I was still a Reserve officer. Then there was no tuition, and I had saved a little money in the Navy. But I got stranded over there and had to hitchhike back on a boat, an Army transport out of Bremerhaven. But I got elected President of the Association des Auditeurs et Anciens Auditeurs de la Academie de Droit International de La Haye, because of this campaign acquired political sensitivity. Of course, I had to go to Salzburg and arrange an international conference for the winter. When the winter came, I didn't have any job or any money so I couldn't go, but that gave me another incentive — of course, at that time, there were Czechs, and people from what became the Iron Curtain countries at that international seminar. I came back — at that time I was at Georgetown Law School — and my horizons were so stretched that I didn't do very well, and I flunked out of Georgetown Law School — with honors.

By that time, I was getting quite hungry, and in 1950 I began working with the CIA as an Intelligence Support Officer. for the next six years, I had the very unusual job of getting what you might call support material to help in the planning, staffing and implementation of clandestine operations. This involved going to State, Defense, after '53 — USIA, AID and its predecessor, and getting information that could be useful on area studies and policy, clearances from State, and so on. So this gave me a tremendous visibility where I was looking over all the China walls within the CIA. But also, coming into contact with all these

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different agencies — usually through classified channels where I would have one or two contacts, and then going directly to analysts and other people.

I could never give them anything — they would just have to give me something on faith. So this, in a sense, was a tremendous diplomatic challenge, to get the things you need when you could give no recognition, appreciation, or power to the people who were helping you. So I came in contact with many, many of the people in the international research and policy community.

*Q: That were very much involved in the operations side?*

VETTER: That's right. And so many of those people subsequently became Ambassadors — in the biographic register and places like that. Well, after about almost 6 years in CIA, one day I went into US Information Agency to a man named Henry Loomis, who subsequently became head of the Voice of America, and I said to Henry, you know, I'm very much interested in USIA because I've seen so much of it. Of course, I had cased it as a CIA liaison officer. I said, "Do you have any suggestions for the possibility of transferring to USIA?" He said, "Chuck, are you really serious?" I said, "Yes." I had just finished the advanced course on Communism at the CIA, the advanced operations course, and there was a political crisis in East Pakistan — now Bangladesh.

*Q: Where are we now?*

VETTER: This is 1955. William Donovan at CIA had a prototype program, an anti-Communist program in Thailand, that had been turned over to USIA — to highlight the evils of Communism, get people involved in self-help, nation-building programs. Well, I went out on 10-days notice — my whole life changed. It was agreed that I would eventually come back as a mid-level training officer in USIA, in charge of Cross-Cultural Communications, International Political Studies, and Communism. First, I was to go with the Assistant Director, Hunt Damon to East Pakistan, do an anti-communist training program for East Pakistan officials, and then come back and join USIA. In the mean time,

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be on loan for this very short TDY. Well, the super-adrenalated Bengalis were not about to be into a program such as we were able to do in Thailand. They had quite different political ambiente, background, political climate, and so I ended up giving public relations officers and other people courses in political science and communications.

*Q: You mean the Bengalis refused? Did they know about your course and say, We will not take it?*

VETTER: No, they said, We're not going to have any anti-Communism programs like you had in Thailand.

*Q: Were these officials?*

VETTER: The thing is, these were all officials. They were government information officers going out in mobile teams. It was a holdover from the British information system and it stopped at the end of colonialism. Their trucks, their movies, their cultural programs, their publications, their propaganda were carry-overs from the British.

*Q: Why did they take that position? Were they already pro-Communist.*

VETTER: There was a very strong leftist movement in East Pakistan and they didn't want to provoke, or give ammunition that they were running dogs of the imperialists. So we ended up doing education. In the process, I met my wife. She was there with the State Department. We met there, and after a very stormy, diversified, multi-continental romance, we were married here in Washington in 1957. I came back, and in 1956, transferred to the USIA Training Division, and began a 20-year career with USIA. I had been 6 years with CIA, and then 20 with USIA. When I came in, we were just beginning the Junior Officer Program. Now USIA and State have the same Junior Officer entrance exams.

*Q: Are they identical?*

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VETTER: There are sections that are identical. I really can't answer because, what happened is that they began to develop a special USIA exam in the early 90s, where they had to give evidence of writing, they had to have a background to illustrate their communication capacities, although some of the basic parts are the same. But now with this new exam that's come out, that's supposed to be unbiased, not sexist or racist or what have you, I think that they're taking the same exam — I really don't know. At that time, there was no connection. There was a simple written exam and then an interview with experienced officers. And a lot of the early USIA officers were very experienced media people that were coming in, almost on the equivalent of a lateral entry. The people in the Junior Officer Program were younger people, but often quite experienced people who came in with a much more informal entrance process.

Subsequently that was changed, but I take great pride in my early days with those Junior Officer classes. Because many of those Junior Officers of the 50s, 60s, 70s, have become, not only Public Affairs Officers, but Ambassadors. Many of them have had very distinguished careers after they left government. It was a very close-knit program, closely personal, because it was so much smaller than the State Department and the military. At that time, I began to do quite a bit of lecturing on — public diplomacy is what we call it now — on American information-cultural propaganda programs — I'm putting a positive spin on propaganda — with other agencies. So I began to do a lot of orientation work at State — this is from the mid-50s on — ICA(International Cooperation Administrations), now AID this, again, was giving me a type of cross-cultural experience with other government agency cultures.

I used to believe originally that cross-cultural communication was between different countries, and I began to see that the worst cross-cultural communication I had to deal with was between agencies of the Federal Government. They each had their own jargon, their own values, their own priorities, their own Congressional relations, and they even smelled differently. So this was playing into a pattern of preparation.

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Another thing I became extremely involved in is the Foreign Service National Employees (FSNs). At that time probably about 55% of the USIA employees were not American citizens. They were nationals of the countries where we had programs, or had been brought here for the Voice of America, or the Press Service. And it was these national employees that became, in a sense, my teachers. And also, because, at that time, way beyond any of the State Department training, we were bringing national employees here for 3-month programs that would take them all over the United States. We had our terms — at that time, we called them “local” employees, because they were locally hired. Then “local” became pejorative, a sort of second-class citizen-type thing.

So then we went to “foreign nationals”— the national employees that worked with USIA, particularly in the early days, were often leaders who could not get as good a job, were motivated ideologically to join the Americans, to build a democratic society, to build a pluralistic society in their own countries. So many of them were tremendously well-connected in their own cultures. Also, in many posts, you could get women who were educated and came from the best families, who could appropriately work with the diplomatic corps, like in Italy, where they couldn't work for the government appropriately, and they couldn't work in commerce and industry as high-born, educated ladies. But they could work with USIA. We had some of the most fantastic people working with our program, in terms of their education, their qualification, their motivation, their political savvy, their connections in the society in which they lived — just invaluable. We had quite a few people with connections of that nature in the Embassy in the Philippines also.

*Q: The salary and terms of employment were, I assume, the same in terms of USIA nationals as they were for State and Defense?*

VETTER: No, this was always a bone of contention, because many of our top nationals had functions that were taking them out into contact with the leaders of the countries, and also their own personal qualifications were so much higher than somebody working in the Visa Section or the Travel Section, so there was always quite a dialectic and tension



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between the nationals working for USIA and the nationals working for other government agencies.

*Q: You mean your nationals were better-paid?*

VETTER: Better paid, more leverage, more interesting jobs, more positions, more respect. This is for the top ones. This, of course, varied greatly from country to country and post to post. We were never able really to get many nationals of that caliber in the African countries. So often we would find ourselves reliant on third-country nationals, expatriates from other countries that happened to be in that country and we'd pick them up. They'd often be French or Belgian, people like that, working in our African posts. Or people coming to work in the Ivory Coast from Guinea, some place like that, who had education that we could not find locally. Because, in some of those countries, for what we could pay, we were often the best-paying job. Today that's quite different, because they can go to American Express or some place else with the qualifications we would need for our programs and get jobs.

And also the motivation — in some countries it became a detriment to work for the Americans, depending on what the political climate was. So over the years, I found a tremendous change in the nature, motivation, social placement, ideological thrust of national employees. Of course, now, one of the sad things is that, in many countries, the nationals are paid more than the American officers — places like Denmark — because of currencies. In the early days, nationals of all of the agencies were attached to the American Civil Service Retirement Plan. Now in almost all countries we are separating that off and they are taking up their own national Social Security programs. Or they come in as contractors and are not part of any retirement plan. With budget cuts and increasing reliance on technology, the FSN population has been drastically cut.

I showed you a copy of my book which you tell me you've had for ten years — this book, *Citizen Ambassadors*, paradoxically, was produced by the Mormons at Brigham Young

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University, and I'm not a Mormon. But it takes 60 of the stereotypic questions about Americans, that Americans get overseas or with people coming to this country, and gives non-confrontational responses to them. I put this together because I found the Americans I was training were not very coherent or relevant in their answers to the questions they were getting, or thought they were getting, from people overseas.

*Q: I might just interject here for possible researchers that we are interested in the kinds of issues that were giving trouble in this period so they can trace it down if they want.*

VETTER: There were four categories, as you remember: American Society and Culture, American Government, America in the World Economy, and American Foreign Policy. Incidentally, this book is in its seventh printing, and in 1983 when it came out — it was sixty questions — I looked at it just recently and would say that fifty-three of the sixty questions are just as relevant today, particularly on society, culture, government — as they were when the books was written. You might have to change Reagan to Bush or to Clinton. Some of the answers are a little depasse because of the end of the Cold War. The basic book is a paradigm of taking a potentially embarrassing question and giving a person an approach for using their own experience (maybe giving them a little context) for a relevant, non propaganda, non apologetic conversation. For instance, take Question 10: Why do whites in America hate blacks and other minorities? In the response I say, "I can't answer for all Americans, but in my life, with my friends, my school, my family..." Then follow with a personalized response. My wife is a little unhappy with the book because it has a lot of our personal life in there, because I would use personal things from my own life where I am most credible, where I can be most believed and relevant. But this book is dedicated to the national employees, because those people have been on the bridge between their country and our country, their culture and our culture, their government and our government. Many of them, as you know, have continuity — ten, fifteen twenty years.

*Q: Let me just record that the title of the book is CITIZEN AMBASSADORS: Guidelines for Responding to Questions Asked About America, by Charles T. Vetter, Jr., and is published*

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*by Brigham-Young University. There is also the 1995 revision CITIZEN DIPLOMACY: Responding to Questions about America, David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.*

VETTER: It was written in 1983, the last printing was in 1995, an updated version. Moving on from this: I stayed in the Training Division and I got good promotions, but come 1961 and the Kennedy Administration — before too long, came the Peace Corps. Now, the Peace Corps had no Training Division or training experience — it was brand-new. So Paul Conroy and myself from the Training Division were called on to help formulate the Peace Corps training program.

*Q: You are still in USIA?*

VETTER: Oh, yes.

*Q: Who called on you?*

VETTER: This was done at the Director level. As all new agencies do, they draw personnel on a temporary basis from Security, from Administration, from Finance and so on, on loan, until they get their own people recruited and brought in. So I started working with Peace Corps, and I was doing these very specific programs in Peace Corps training — which in the early years were almost always conducted on college campuses. We had developed a training technique called “Meet the Critic” and we used to do this in USIA where we would take people who were about to go overseas, ranging from Public Affairs Officers to clerical staff, and the aim was to give people a feel for some of the current positions of the United States, and the questions that were in peoples' minds, and suggestions for person-to-person conversation.

The way we did it was to bring somebody up, say, who was going to Colombia, and I would assume the role of a Colombian — this is in front of everyone else. Other people might be going to other countries. Say there is something currently dealing with Colombia,

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and I might say, [heavy Hispanic accent] 'Why are you treating us South Americans so badly, because we have been your friends, even though you have stolen much of our country and Panama, and you don't give us fair coffee prices, and now you are limiting because of these drugs — we wouldn't have a drug problem if you didn't have the mercado, the market, and the war on drugs you're conducting is stupid, because you have to stop people buying it in your country, because they are going to come here — and if you stop us from producing, somebody else in Pakistan will. Why don't you.....' . Now of course, the average American has never had to face this. And we'd have some experienced officers from that country there, and after the role play, we'd come back, make a few comments, and then have the experts who have had on-site experience. As a training device, it was invaluable, because everybody in that room was vicariously in the hot seat. And so when I went to Peace Corps projects (and I instructed with over 200 Peace Corps training programs), I would give the lecture on Communism, in which I would also do role-playing and take questions as a Soviet — I do that very well — then come out of the role as a communist and process the encounter. Then I would do a “meet the critic” exercise of the volunteer's country of assignment.

Remember the American National Exhibition in Moscow when they had the 'kitchen debate'? I was the Training Officer Supervisor of the 75 Russian-speaking American guides in Moscow for that exhibit. And, of course, when I first met them, I was introduced as [Russian accent] “Alexander Petrovitch Sirov of the Soviet Ministry of Culture and I am very happy to welcome you young people who are coming to my country for this very wonderful exchange in the cultural field.” And all these Russian speakers accepted me. The role playing has proved an effective way of getting attention and involvement.

You see, because this is a TV-media world, and I'm often in a situation where I've had an hour and a half where I have to get peoples' attention and do something that's meaningful to them — and also, most of them already have information overload.

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So I developed a conviction that the thing where I could make the greatest contribution was in attitudes. Because my experience in working with people going overseas is that often the attitude is more important than the language skill. The attitude was often more important than the preceding experience. I can remember — slightly fictionalized — a young State Department couple, maybe about 15 years ago. They both had fluency in Spanish, and they had a great desire, particularly the wife, to go to Madrid. People in the A-100 course at State do not often get assigned to Madrid, and so what happened was that they were assigned to a garden spot — Tegucigalpa, Honduras — and they were so disappointed and mad, and he argued and argued, so finally they said to him, “You go to Tegucigalpa or you go no place.” So his basic attitude was, ‘All right, I’ll go, but that next assignment better be good.’ So they went with no interest, no respect, put a calendar on the wall, marked off the days, never reached out to the people. Of course, the nationals picked that up and they did a lousy job. Even though they had the language and the experience and were ambitious.

That same year, I was working with a group in AID, and in that group was a young couple going on an agricultural project to Tegucigalpa from Iowa. Never been out of the United States, had no Spanish. They went. They were interested. Any place in the world you can get English speaking people to help you with the local language — they reached out, they learned, they gave, they did a fantastic job. No language. And of course, to me, the basic difference was attitude.

Now, a lecture, where I do most of my work, is a lousy way of passing on the information unless it is reinforced by enforced reading or relevant experience. A lecture is probably one of the best ways to motivate people, break stereotypes, inspire, and to get people to see the relevance of other things they are doing — to see the context. So I began, not so much from wanting to pass on information as to affect attitudes. My basic approach in my lectures on Communism was not to tell what terrible people the Communists were, a good guy-bad guy approach — but to say: We are in a world that is highly competitive,

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and if we are going to prevail, we've got to know our competition realistically, we've got to know ourselves realistically, and we have to be able to communicate the difference and the relevance, to other people, of the superiority of the democratic system, in contrast to the authoritarian system.

Again, really working on attitudes. Knowing damn well that people really don't remember lectures very much. Also, because of the TV and computer thing, I began to use the role-playing, the accents, the drama, and then did a tremendous amount of homework on the groups so I would know what was relevant to them, and could bring up the things out of all this varied experience I've had that would be most useful to them going to that country. So I got so active in Peace Corps training that Sargent Shriver asked me, "Would you like to join as a GS-15 in our Training Division" — even though he knew of my CIA background. I accepted.

I met Edward R. Murrow who was then Director of the Agency [USIA] at National Airport and told him I was going. He said, "Chuck, I've heard so much about you" — partly because I'd been doing work in national strategy seminars in the United States with the Legal Department's permission, because we're not supposed to work in the United States. But Bobby Kennedy and others were doing these anti-Communist programs all over the United States, and governors and Chambers of commerce were sponsoring these things. I was participating, doing the Russian role-playing, talking about the Soviet Marxist ideology as a code of communication. So Edward R. Murrow said, "Come to my office before you finally move." So I went to his office one day and he was sitting there — you know he died of lung cancer — and his fingers were just brown from smoking Camels, and he said, "Chuck, if you had your druthers, what would you rather do?" "I said, I'd stay in this agency — I can do more for Peace Corps from USIA — I love this agency, but I'm stuck where I am, I'm never going to get a promotion in the Training Division in the current situation."

So he created a job for me in the Office of Public Affairs of USIA, where I spent about half of my time with the Peace Corps, and the other half with the Training Division and Public

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Affairs Division. And that job, with an assistant and with independence, took me all over America— before I was through, I worked in 185 Peace Corps training projects.

*Q: So you were full-time on the Peace corps side?*

VETTER: No, Three-quarters of the time, half the time — it depended. I was going to colleges and universities, to Hawaii, Puerto Rico — but it also enriched what I was doing because I was still lecturing at FSI, I was still lecturing at AID, I was still lecturing in USIA.

*Q: What years are we talking about now?*

VETTER: We're talking about '62 to about '67 — five years or so. But Edward R. Murrow died and Leonard Marks came in, and his amanuensis — his #minence grise — was Howard Chernoff who really ran the Agency on a day-to-day basis. Peace Corps used to have what they called “termination conferences” where they'd take the Peace Corps volunteers just before they came home and have a meeting in the capital city to prepare them to return, but also to get the information on their experiences. There were two Peace Corps groups that were having a termination conference. They had never invited an outside officer to participate, and they invited me to go to the Philippines for that conference and they would pay all my expenses. Mr. Chernoff turned it down. So I had the temerity to go up to Mr. Chernoff and say, “Why have you turned this down? I can learn so much about USIA, about State, about the Philippines, and what our policies are and how they are received from the people who have been living out among the people.” He said, “How much of your time are you spending on Peace Corps?” I said, “About thirty-five percent, I would say — that's the way Mr. Murrow set it up.” He said, “Mr. Murrow is dead. Sit here.”

He went in and called Jack Vaughn [Director of the Peace Corps] and said, Do you want Vetter for two years? This is a progressive personnel assignment, you understand. Vaughn said, “Sure, wonderful.” So I was all prepared to leave and go to Peace Corps. I said, “Why fight this?” With this man here, I don't have a chance. He already abolished

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my job that Murrow had created and set me back where I was deeply resented in the Training Division. Suddenly a call comes through and says, We cannot use Vetter — he has CIA experience. It hadn't bothered Shriver, but it bothered Peace Corps staff and they terminated the assignment and my current work with Peace Corps training.

*Q: They were neurotic about that.*

VETTER: They were very neurotic at that time. So suddenly I was a refugee in my own agency. About that time, we were getting more and more active in Vietnam, and I went to the Assistant Director for East Asia, Dan Oleksiw and said, “ would very much like to go to Vietnam.” Well, the long and short of it — he assigned me as Provincial Rep to Can Tho in Juspao without consulting the Public Affairs Officer in Vietnam who had read about it in a USIA publication. So this guy raised so much hell — it wasn't against me personally — it was just that this man would assign a senior officer to Vietnam without consulting him. It ended up that he created a job for me as Area Training Officer for National Employees in East Asia.

And that's where we met, because they created that job with PAO Hank Miller. I traveled from Korea to Burma in the next two years, until there was a cutback and that job was eliminated. I conducted training programs principally for USIA workers. Remember, this was a new administration, explaining Nixon's foreign policy — new management techniques of communication and new political policy. Every post I went to there were National Employees who had been in the Washington Training programs and had been in our home — I think my wife Alice has fed well over 2500 National Employees. We never got any credit for this. You realize, my position in USIA was quite ambiguous because all these things I was doing were not in any succinct job description.

*Q: You were a wandering planet...*



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VETTER: ...exactly. And that had great advantages, except, of course, it had no power. I got excellent promotions.

*Q: Who would do your Efficiency Reports?*

VETTER: The Director of Public Affairs during that one job — usually the Director of Training. Hank Miller, the PAO in the Philippines, did my Efficiency Reports and then they were passed back through the Training Division.

*Q: Is there any generalization or value judgement comment that you would like to make about your relationship over these years when you were really not in the central operational role in any of these agencies. How did it affect you and how happy were you in that position?*

VETTER: The fact is that, in a Training Division and in a training course, unless you're doing something from their point of view, they're not going to invite you back. When you look and see that over a period of more than twenty years I was giving between 300-350 — one year, right after I had started working with Peace Corps, I gave 420 lectures, workshops, seminars, consultations in a year. So, perhaps as a “performer” I had many ups and downs-personally, in an oft neglected family, and professionally.

*Q: How much input to the substance of the training you were giving did you get from the people higher up the line?*

VETTER: I was lecturing on Communism and Communist ideology. I spent a great deal of my time talking to returning officers, attending briefing sessions and policy meetings. Of course, by this time, I was fairly well known, so that if I had any specific problems — say I had a group that I was working with that was going to Nigeria, I'd call our Desk Officers and say, What are some of the things you think are important for these people to know — they're going to be doing such-and-such. Is there anything they should be aware of or knowledgeable about? One some of these things, of course, I had very rich insight

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because I was getting it from the nationals. Many of these nationals — partly because they had been in my home — would tell me things they couldn't tell their American supervisors — in confidence. That's why I dedicated the book to them, because they taught me so much. They were my gurus.

*Q: When you would be about to go overseas, would you typically stop in at the Desks in State, as well as USIA, to brief yourself?*

VETTER: You see, I was really working domestically. I knew a lot of the State people because I had seen them in their Training Programs over the years. I would pick up a telephone book and I would know somebody in almost every desk in State, AID — sometimes Defense, sometimes CIA. The great bulk of my work until I went to Manila was here. So when I went to Asia, of course, I consulted with the Political and Economics and other people, but also, the work I was doing was taking the Washington word — the Nixon Administration and the new policies — how to articulate, how to answer questions about them — more or less involved, not so much in policy writing or formulation, but in oral articulation, conversational explanation of policy in a way that was relevant to people in that country, in that audience. As I needed material — because as a Liaison Officer in the CIA, I had made all these contacts, had all these friends that I knew intimately, because, when USIA came into being, part of the State Department Research went to the new USIA Research, so I knew people in both areas.

*Q: Did USIA, during much of your period, have its own training institute like the Foreign Service Institute?*

VETTER: It had a Training Division.

*Q: Where, physically, did that work?*

VETTER: It started off on New York Avenue, in a separate building.

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*Q: How many trainers would it have?*

VETTER: We had a staff of about 10 people — we had Secretarial Training, we had Junior Officer Training, we had Foreign National Training. We had some mid-career conferences. Of course, USIA people went to the War Colleges and the Senior Seminar. We had people in the universities as they did in State. So sometimes it depended, we went through waves. There'd be very close contact between State and USIA training, and sometimes they'd be absolutely disjunct and different. Sometimes our Junior Officers would spend as much as a month and a half in the A-100 class. Then somebody would decide, No, these people are really from two different cultures — it's not a good idea to mix them. They visit now, for one or two days.

*Q: I wonder whether the Foreign Service Institute, which is going to be the government international affairs training, will take in the other agencies, or whether they will just...*

VETTER: I'm sure they are going to try to set up sort of a National Foreign Affairs University situation — you remember at Maxwell AFB, the Air University had Squadron Officer School, Air Command Staff, and War Colleges — all part of this Air University, plus the chaplains' training and many others. I imagine that what they're trying to set up in Arlington Hall is an analog of Foreign Affairs University for the whole government. Of course, in many ways, it's already been doing that — besides training, particularly in languages.

Let me just carry on the career — becoming so involved in what I thought was so important with the National employees. Let me give you an example: In 1967, we were having trouble with the very well-educated and sharp Japanese National Employees, because we were sending tons of material to them for them to translate into Japanese for pamphlets and movies and slides. But they were having a hard time understanding the Counter-Revolution — Veterans Against Vietnam, the hippies — a whole series of things. So the Assistant Director for the Far East said, Chuck, do you think you could go to Japan

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and go to our posts and conduct seminars to help these people better understand what's happening? So I thought about it and I said, "I'd love to. I know many of them anyway — they've already been to the United States and been to my classes, been in my home. I think I've got some ideas."

So what I did was to develop a presentation that I still use on occasion called "7 Dying Imperialisms." The thesis of this was that it's almost impossible to be a dictator today when people have alternatives. We've had a communications revolution that has given people alternatives, all over the world. On every level of society, it's more and more difficult to have authoritarian or dictatorial society. The 7 dying imperialisms were: Colonialism — one country dominating another; National Dictatorship — one man, one party, controlling everything; Marital Imperialism; Parental Imperialism; Educational Imperialism; Bureaucratic Imperialism; Religious Imperialism.

In each one of these, I was able to focus on the changes taking place in the United States, but also the changes taking place in the family life, relations with children — or how Colonialism was just about dead because, first of all, it was too expensive to control another country, even if you could do it, and even though there had been a tremendous increase in power, power had also been given to the individual in a system society. It's not you and the horse and God, but you and the automobile and systems — of roads, developments, radio, tires, laws, courts and God. One man or one woman with a bomb can influence a system that will influence a million people. So in a sense, you've given the power to destroy to people, as well as through nuclear bombs, the power to concentrate in certain cones. In the personal relationships, things are beginning to change between men and women in Japan, and particularly in the family, one very strong thing is mother-in-law-power. The bride's mother or the groom's mother, often, is the most powerful person in the family.

*Q: Also in India, I understand.*

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VETTER: Same thing. So you're finding young people — this is one reason why everybody is so surprised with this Japanese commoner who has agreed to marry the Crown Prince in Japan. She's a very successful Foreign Service Officer in her own right, and she is giving up that kind of freedom to go into that hierarchy. The fact is, that hierarchy is not the same as it was in Hirohito's time. There's so many things that are changing, and of course, television has been an enormous instrumentality.

But I went to Japan and went all over to six different posts — Hiroshima, Osaka, Fukuoka, Sendai, Tokyo — and brought the national staff together to give them a context in which to judge all this material they were getting from the US. Of course, much of my work has been to specialize in understanding and communicating about American psychology, policy institutions, and — incidentally, I subsequently finished my law degree at National University, where you could salvage it, then I got my Master's in Law at George Washington University. Then they transferred the LLBs to JDs for \$25. So my doctorate is Juris Doctor, it's not a Ph.D. — but in my work, people just listen with about ten ergs more energy if you say Doctor in a lecturing or consulting situation. So my law and my political experience and my selling experience and my teaching experience helped me tremendously in interpreting the United States to Americans, to say nothing of people in all these audiences around the world. So that went very well, in 1967. It was a prelude to the job that I subsequently got as Regional Training Officer in Manila.

I spent the largest part of my time in Vietnam, getting all over Vietnam, then Cambodia, Burma, Taiwan, Laos, Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The only place I didn't go was Australia.

*Q: You had a full-fledged home set up in Manila.*

VETTER: Yes, I had an apartment. At that time, Alice and I were divorced. I shaped up a little bit and when I got back, we got remarried. But at that time, I had an apartment in the Tropicana Hotel.

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*Q: Right across the road from the Embassy.*

VETTER: When I came back, I was a Grade 2 Officer(FSR-2), and what were they going to do with me? I didn't have enough administrative experience to send me out. I found out that, at the FSI, the Foreign Affairs Interdepartmental Seminar — originally the counter-insurgency course — then it sort of turned into a Senior Officer course on developing countries, as well as counter-insurgency and anti-terrorism. Then it expanded a little bit to become a three-week baby Senior Seminar, taking in not only the developing countries but the European countries and the whole interaction, particularly vis-à-vis the Soviet Union — Eastern part. A friend of mine was leaving and it was a senior job. So I went in and my last seven years in the FSI were as USIA Faculty Representative on the faculty of the Foreign Affairs Interdepartmental Seminar, and then it became the Foreign Affairs Executive Seminar. The Seminar was under the aegis of the National Security Council but it was located in FSI with inter-agency availability.

I became not only the USIA faculty rep, responsible for getting USIA people there, but also part of the whole process of bringing in speakers and getting subjects. Also, we would break up into regional seminars. At one time or another, I was in every geographic region, but mostly specializing in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. This exposed me to a tremendous amount of material, because we would have Haig over there all the time when he was Kissinger's deputy — we could draw on the very best people because these were Senior Officers, usually 13s and above, Lt.-Cols. and above, from all of the agencies. On the faculty was a CIA man, two Defense people, a State Department, AID, and I was USIA. I was also continuing my lectures. We had six of these seminars a year, but in the meantime, I was continuing my lecturing all over the government, as well as academic and non-government organizations.

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*Q: This goes to something you mentioned before: looking over all these provincial walls, China walls — how do you compare the personnel practices, the psychology, the demands? Or the effectiveness of the training programs?*

VETTER: Exactly. This might give you an idea: on evaluations of the programs — rather detailed evaluation at the end, 99% of the time, the military would rate things much higher than the State Department. You had a hell of a time getting State Department officers in there — who needs that? It was extremely popular with the military, and it still exists, principally as a result of the military. It would stretch their horizons in an important way and they would be extremely appreciative. But it was almost impossible for a State Department person to see this as relevant to anything — Why the hell should I go there? If they came, they were gratified. It gave them contact with working people. I would recruit very actively USIA people so they would come over there and make some contacts. They were really excellent sessions, the quality-level of the Senior Seminar, but much shorter. It was a tremendously invigorating thing to get all these people away from their In-Boxes in Washington. Of course, some of them came from all over the world. The military would bring people from Hawaii and other places.

But the State Department people and some of the USIA people were almost arrogant — “This is a waste of time and I know all that already — American foreign policy!” But when they got there, had all these Assistant Secretaries, and all these people from industry, and all these people from the political world come in, it was tremendously enriching for the State Department people, too. But to get them there or to get their supervisors to let them go was another problem. So this was a tremendous experience in dealing with the psychology of different operations, different agencies, in the connection of this enrichment program on current affairs, the current dynamics of the American economy, the current dynamics of the process-making — youth — and of course, during that time, you had the Youth rebellion, you had all kinds of things that were in the headlines. But many of the

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bureaucrats just didn't understand, because they were beyond their realm. We'd bring in these people to help them understand some of these tensions in American society.

That was an enriching experience. Here I was, considering myself the ambassador from USIA, and going to all these agencies, but my own officer says, What the hell — is this relevant? I can think of many times when, if anybody had had a say, they would have got me out, because I was not fungible to them in terms of traditional career activity. Just nothing like it before or since. So by the time I retired — I retired from that job — had a wonderful retirement, incidentally. It was getting ready for the Presidential Campaign and Ford was running. The Republican Party has something called the 'Eagles.' These are people who have given over \$10,000 to the Republican National Committee. Because one of my friends was thinking about bringing me into the finance area after I got out of the Hatch Act. I was invited to the White House with the 'Eagles' to meet the President, and that was the day I took my final papers to USIA Personnel, came out and walked from USIA — 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue — to the White House. Went up to Mr. Ford and Mr. Rockefeller, and said, Thank you for throwing this lovely retirement party! It was a great way to go.

I would say, looking back over my career, that the things that — at this Foreign Service thing, I had a lot of the teacher/professor gratifications — I remember you from 1961, and people have remembered an insight that helped them cope. I do this 'meet the critic' session and became quite famous for that, as well as for the role-playing. People would come back from overseas and say, Chuck, I remember the 'meet the critic' sessions, I never had questions like that. Another person would come back and say, "Thank God for those. From the time I got out to the time I got back, people were asking me those questions, hitting me on the head."

Of course, again, it was the attitude. If the American was reaching out, showing that it wouldn't be impolite to ask questions about American policy, they got the questions. You know the questions are there. But people had sort of communicated that it would



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be bad manners to bring up these things. I used to do a lot of work in the Dependents' Course, with wives — it was a Wives' Course, and now you don't use Wives anymore, you use Dependents. I did a lot of work on Re-Entry Programs. I did a lot of work in the bureaucracy, to get the bureaucracy at State and USIA to realize what the careers and lives were of these National Employees — how to direct some of the agency policy to give these people the dignity and appreciation and the training, the things necessary to keep their morale and motivation.

*Q: Did you train other trainers? I gather you developed your particular training function yourself.*

VETTER: Yes. It's interesting, because there's a rather large training community. There's the ASTD, the American Society for Training and Development — something like that. It's governmental, a great brotherhood of trainers. We used to have the Interagency Training Roundtable of people from international agencies and the heads of training officers who would meet once or twice a month and discuss mutual training problems. It was all men when I came in in the 50s, and now, do you realize, women are taking over.

*Q: More than 50%*

VETTER: Oh, yes — in training, in industry and government — everywhere. A good Training Officer is a nurturing person, man or woman. Training jobs have very little power and often are not very well paid. First things cut off in a budget slice. But women can find a professional outlet, they can get satisfaction and motivation to do excellent work, with much less power and money involved. So they're moving into training, they're moving into administrative jobs, almost co-opting the field. So this Round Table went out of business because they had lost contact with the veteran training people who could give them the staffs and the meeting places — it was 90% women, and in any given meeting, half of those women were looking for jobs in cross-cultural training. This has become a sub-industry — cross-culture. I realized, quite a while ago, that I'm not really a

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training specialist, because a training specialist is an administrator — all the latest training techniques, bibliographies — I'm merely a performer, a lecturer, a resource for training officers, rather than a Training Officer.

*Q: The question I was moving towards was the effectiveness, or even the existence of a training system for trainers. You were a successful trainer, but when you left, what provision was there to pass on your skills to your successors?*

VETTER: Well, in a sense, that's the cost you pay for being so generous. I was never seen as a Training Officer, I answered to the Training Division, but I was so disjunct — I was just somebody in deputation to FSI.

*Q: So nobody said, Here is the bunch of people coming on — teach them what you know about this?*

VETTER: Only selectively. For instance, we've done quite a few programs, and I've done quite a bit of this since I got out, of training trainers — right now there is a big spate of programs in training trainers, for the former Soviet Union.

*Q: What about FSI.*

VETTER: They have specialists in cross-cultural communication, mostly in connection with languages, area studies.

*Q: But who trains the specialists?*

VETTER: Specialists are developed through their academic, military, corporate, organizational careers, and experiences. You see, you bring up an interesting point, and this is something I feel very strongly about, based on my experience. First of all, I've always felt you have to make a distinction between training, orientation, and education. For me, any training must include some kind of testing or evaluation, where the person is responsible to demonstrate some change in knowledge, skill, attitude. I've watched training

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people when they were writing up their budgets, I've seen people in the oil companies, they say, "we've got a good training program for Saudi Arabia! Went to New York, got some real experts, talked to them three or four days, sent them out!"

No way is that training — that's orientation. Orientation is pretty much cafeteria. People just pick out of what they have, they're not responsible for anything, they don't have to take any tests, and some orientations may be as long as two or three weeks, or two or three months. But that's not training. Government bureaucrats expect training outputs from orientation. Time and time again I've seen tremendous flaps because people expect people to perform as if they had been trained, and they had only received orientation, even though the orientation may have been very good. Education, just because of the time it takes, involves more training. But there's going to be a change just because so much time has been invested in an education situation.

The other thing is that, in training work, agencies are so different in what they contribute, and this changes so much from time to time, from personnel people to personnel people. I see this particularly in the military, vis-à-vis international officers. One man may come in with this tremendous sense of military diplomacy, and he sees that those international colonels, and majors and captains get priority treatment in the officers' club, commission, host families, tours of Washington. Another guy will come in and just see them as a pain in the ass — why are we wasting all our time with these characters, just fouling up my instructors. The morale, the effectiveness of the training program for these international people depends so much on the attitude of the people who are running it. I've seen it happen in USIA, depending on what the personnel people and what the Director saw as the function and the importance of training — that's what we got in personnel and assignments.

*Q: It is also related to the personnel structure. For example, in the military, their assignments will often be decided fifteen months ahead, and then they get a year of training preparing for the assignment. I'm thinking, I suppose, mostly of military attach#s.*

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*We've never been able to do that except in a few highly specialized areas like Arab Studies or Soviet Studies.*

VETTER: I participated in the Military Attach# Training Course for about 20 years. So, again, this is another thing that has been very gratifying. I participated in so many different kinds of training programs as a resource.

*Q: Could you, on the basis of your experience, put on a critical hat and point out the various pros and cons of the various agencies and their training functions, as you have experienced them?*

VETTER: I think that an integral part of a military career, almost a predestined part of the time, goes into training and preparation. It is part of the whole hierarchy. So it's difficult to compare the various permissiveness of the State Department, USIA — which is highly personalistic, usually depending more in the initial stages on the person's pre-career or pre-preparation, and then on the nature of their assignments and how visible those assignments have been, and how well they've been translated, and their efficiency reports. So I've found that all during those years, the people who were really least willing and least feeling of need of training were State Department. A little bit more humility at AID because very often they needed specific skills. But nine times out of ten the AID people brought the skills in with them — agriculture, market development, school administration, what have you.

There was a man named Mike Guido that ran training for AID for years. I thought he ran a very good and comprehensive course. But when he retired, they contracted out the training. This group of trainers came in from a minority contracting effort. They did a pretty good job in a way, but it was a completely different kind of training, different kind of integrating of these people. All of these agencies have become much more fragmented than they were earlier in our career — you know what I mean. You sort of had a family, an

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identification, a context. Now USIA is television and VOA, and they're thinking of splitting those of and bringing in Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Asia — it's so fragmented.

*Q: USIA always had the fundamental fragmentation between the information people and the cultural. A lot of the USIA people felt they were in this and they didn't want assignments in that.*

VETTER: Another thing is that when I first came into training, and in the early years of your training, it was more or less content-oriented. You went in and had briefings and got country plans and had people lecturing at you, a lot of reading to do. Then the pendulum began to swing to more and more experiential, till it got way over to the extreme that you've got to know yourself first before you can understand somebody else. Touchy-feely and all of this sociological role-playing and game-playing.

*Q: That was not in when I came through.*

VETTER: Oh, no. That was in the late 70s. So what happened is that many of your training officers were not area experts. They were people skilled in gaming, in running interpersonal focus groups, buzz groups, that sort of stuff. Now the good training programs are mixing experiential and content, but for a while, it go so we couldn't have any content in training, just feel-good, and many of the trainers were not really experts in anything except these processes and these devices for affecting attitudes — values, perceptions, so on and so forth. So I've seen a big change in the methodology. Many of the modern training officers think I'm an old-timer, even though I've had a lot more experience in the role-playing, in the roles I've played plus the interactive role-playing I've described which is probably more experiential than theirs, because I'm dealing with the real facts and real situations, while they're dealing with scenarios that are made-up. Also, there's a lot of gaming that has become a very important part of military training.

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*Q: In the Senior Seminar, I thought the management games were the weakest part of the year — they'd get these great big computerized things — I thought they were very unimpressive. Of course, they may have been improved. That was 22 years ago.*

VETTER: Right now, I went through this whole progression, but I've got to draw a line here, because when the computers came in — this has created a whole different atmosphere: where peoples' time goes, what's important, how things are done. I go to a post today and I'm just flabbergasted, because hardly anyone's using books — they don't have time for books. They're using FAXes and modems and plug-ins for the New York Times data base — they're using resources to get things for special customers out of monographs out of universities, stuff like this to help special target audiences. But the amount of technology that's available — the instantaneous communication, the interactive Worldnet — interviews on television where you bring in three or four countries to here in Washington. It's a different world.

*Q: So I suppose, in the training courses, the juniors are being taught how to use courses for this kind of retrieval — are they?*

VETTER: Yes, I think both State and USIA — but most people coming into the agency now are computer-literate. They've used them in their university training, in their jobs. You know, even today, I'm just flabbergasted, because, the clerk in the store, the waiter in the restaurant has to be able to use the machines to function. So sometimes I feel a little antediluvian, but I still find considerable scope — I'm still lecturing in the CIA, the Future Farmers of America, People to People, high school ambassador programs. I just came back the day before yesterday from Wright-Paterson AFB, the International Officers Class at the Defense Institute for Security Assistance Management. So many of the things I do are still appreciated and relevant.

*Q: I should think that you would have had less of a cut-off in your activities than most officers.*

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VETTER: I would say last year I had about 140 lectures, and that was down from 190 the year before that, and that was down from 250. So gradually there's been a diminution, and now it's the end of the Cold War — and there's an age factor. I'll probably have a hundred this year, but now that my wife has retired, she says, "Let go, retire, quit worrying about these things." Right now, for instance, I can probably give the best briefing on Russia, because I still get FBIS from CIA foreign broadcast information, the daily reports — used to be 'Soviet Reports,' now it's 'Central Eurasian Reports.' I see on C-Span, that fantastic source of information, I see the Moscow evening news three or four times a week. So when you put these things together — but the communication factor is still the key thread that's gone through my work, my study. it's so relevant to diplomacy — so much today is cross-cultural in industry, so much in our communities is cross-cultural.

*Q: We just have about 1/8 inch of tape. Do you want to go into any wind-up points?*

VETTER: I think if you look back over my career, the tremendous increase in magnitude of everything — the tremendous complexity.

*Q: I would say the other way around — the American role has diminished so much from what it was in the 40s — the staff is down, the relative power of so many other countries is up. In a way, it's been a retraction from prominence, even though we're the only super power still.*

VETTER: That's a good point, but it's a little bit off what I had in mind. The fragmentation of almost every institution, every job, every corporation, every agency. Whether this is progress or not is a big debate. When you go into a university and you've got all these different curricula — African-American, Chicano-American. People are not listening to each other. They are advocates. They used to have no influence, but now they're a group — women, African-American, whatever — now have leverage and power and they're competing for power. You no longer have the dictatorial structures that kept — like the Holy Roman Empire and Stalin — kept these ethnic differences down — they're on top.

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*Q: That's the way our system works.*

VETTER: You pay a great price for democracy if you don't know how to play the game. That's where our big challenge is — to help these countries who have never played the game of pluralistic democracy, the market economy — not only understand the end of the game, because they have such unrealistic expectations, but get the context, the joint ventures, the instruction, the information — the principal thing I'm doing now is working on many of these programs. And those programs are giving a whole new dimension to what we are doing in developing countries. So the more you know, the more you know you don't know. In today's world, there are so many opportunities, but the need is for relationship and context. That's another thing about this country — the attitude toward history is Who needs history? If it's important, they'll make a TV special or a mini-series. We're often dealing with people where history is a part of their being and their identification. Their country is who you are, where you are from. Here, who you are is what you do, and the past is not necessarily relevant to your identity. So getting “Where are you from” people together with “what do you do” people is a lot of fun. Of course the ultimate coming challenge is bridging the increasing gap between the “Haves” and the “Have-Nots” at home and abroad. There's a communication, diplomacy challenge!

*Q: I think I will declare that the concluding thought.*

End of interview